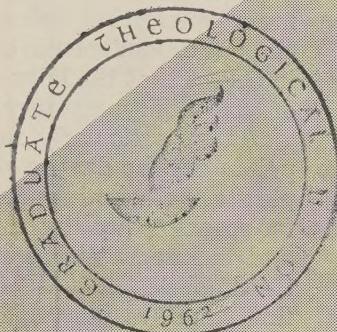


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# Guide

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## THE CHURCH AND THE SACRAMENTS

Rev. Cyril Vollert, S.J.

## THE ART OF GIVING INSTRUCTIONS

Rev. James J. Killgallon

61165  
REV. JOSEPH LYNCH  
4008 PRAIRIE  
BROOKFIELD ILL



IT SEEMS TO ME

## Laymen View Conversions

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For some years there has been a decline in the number of converts to the Church in the United States. And there has also been a noticeable decrease in articles on conversion in the American Catholic press. This makes all the more significant the article of Father O'Brien, "Share Your Faith" in *America*, September 25, 1962. And no less welcome is the two-page discussion by lay people, commenting on the original article, which later appeared in the December 8th issue of the same periodical.

If it can be said that priests in recent years have taken a more penetrating look at the deeper aspects of this problem, the correspondence in *America*, although necessarily limited, indicates that the laity are also eager to get below the surface of that mighty mystery we call conversion.

It is particularly refreshing that more than one layman points out the danger of over-simplifying the immensely complex task of winning souls to the faith. Another recognizes the far-reaching healthy changes effected both among Catholics and our separated brethren by "emerging ecumenism." A third points out that "a non-Catholic, attending Mass for the first time . . . may find the experience more mystifying than edifying . . . the Mass may strike him as an incomprehensible ritual in a strange tongue."

Apostolic priests will scarcely quarrel with the valiant layman who maintains "what the American Catholic layman needs desperately today is recognition by clergy and religious of his own distinct identity as a legitimate, permanent laborer in the vineyard."

And the tribute of a Mormon convert to the priests of Utah needs no commentary. He finds them accessible and friendly, "they offer Mass in an extremely reverent and meaningful manner, encourage lay activities and participation in the worship, and have congregational singing. Their pamphlet racks are filled with truly intelligent pamphlets, magazines, books, encyclicals and newspapers, the sermons are generally instructive as well."

JOHN T. McGINN, C.S.P.

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# The Church and The Sacraments

Rev. Cyril Vollert, S.J.

At the present stage of development of sacramental theology, theologians seldom speak of the sacraments without speaking also of the Church. They are perceiving with increasing comprehension that the mystery of the Church and the mystery of the sacraments may not be separated, even in thought. Our question is this: How is the sacramental system as a whole and how is each of the sacraments related to the Church?

The two great mysteries, Church and sacrament, should illuminate each other. Our understanding of the Church deepens when we ask what the sacraments are, and our understanding of the sacraments increases when we reflect on what the Church is. The faithful in general and also many theologians, particularly in the past, have not had a very clear idea of the relationship between the Church and the sacraments. Every Catholic knows that the Church has the power to confer the sacraments, because Christ who instituted the sacraments entrusted them to the Church. But that is about all that is grasped concerning the relationship between the two. The sacraments are conceived as means of grace for the salvation of the individual (which is true) and nothing else (which is short of the truth). When the sacraments are envisioned in such a way, the Church appears only as administrator of these channels of grace for the individual's benefit, as a purveyor of heavenly treasures. To receive these treasures, the people turn to the sacraments; as soon as they have been given their share they depart, and think no more about the transaction.

If we wish to gain a more adequate knowledge of this relationship, we must start out by regarding the Church precisely as the Church of the sacraments, that is, we must move from an understanding of the Church to the sacraments. And after that we must

come to a realization that the sacraments are the proper activity of the Church, thus proceeding from a consideration of the various sacraments toward a more profound knowledge of the nature of the Church.

We all know that to be a Christian means to believe in Jesus Christ and to belong to the Church He founded. The Church organizes its whole life around the Mass, and its edifices guide the attention of its congregations toward the altar and the tabernacle. We are incorporated into the Church by the sacrament of baptism. As members of the Church we offer the Eucharistic sacrifice, receive Holy Communion, and are granted sacramental pardon of our sins. A man becomes a priest of the Church by the sacrament of Holy Orders. When a Christian man and woman found a home, they inaugurate their life together by the sacrament of Matrimony. At the approach of death we make ourselves ready by receiving the Last Sacraments. Clearly, the sacraments occupy a predominant place in the Church; they set the pattern for every normal Catholic life. Therefore it is important to situate the sacraments correctly in the aggregate of the activities of the Church.

Fortunately the vigorous upsurge of the theology of the Church during the past three or four decades furnishes an excellent basis for a renewed study of the sacraments, enabling us to apprehend the sacraments as vital functions of the life of the Church. Recent concentration on ecclesiology creates an intellectual climate favorable for promoting

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We are indebted to the author and the officers of the Society of Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine for their kind permission to reprint this valuable paper. It appears in the Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Convention of the Society (1962). Annual membership: \$6. Annual Proceedings are available at \$3 a copy. The papers in these volumes are invaluable sources for all who teach Christian Doctrine. Write: The Secretary, SCCTSD, Regis College, Weston 93, Mass.

a more lucid appreciation of the sacraments as acts of the Church that involve the co-operation of the whole Christ, head and body, the hierarchy and the faithful.

Too often the sacraments have been regarded from an excessively individualist point of view; they have been reduced to the status of instruments of grace meant to procure the individual's salvation. The sacraments are more than that; they are prolongations of Christ's activity in the Church, designed by Him to associate His members in His own redemptive mission and to empower them to work with Him in constructing the Kingdom of God. Unquestionably the sacraments are instruments of grace that unite the recipient with God. But this union with God is brought about in the measure of our activity among the new people of God, in the body of Christ. Fellowship with the Savior creates new bonds among men; the believer who has been incorporated into the Church can and should collaborate in building up the community of love that is based on Christ.

When Jesus Christ founded the Church, what He organized into a hierarchical, juridical society was not an amorphous mass of individual men in need of salvation, but the "people of God." The eternal Son of God, who is also the Son of Mary, a daughter of Adam, has become one with us, not only in nature, but also in race. He belongs to the one mankind, which is more than a conglomeration of many individuals; it is a real unity, as is plain from the descent of all men from the one Adam. In our father Adam we were elevated to a supernatural end. In spite of sin which has marked every stage of our history, God maintains our supernatural calling because the man Jesus is a member of our human family. God sees us all as brothers and sisters of His incarnate Son, as His own people with whom He contracted a new and eternal covenant. By the coming of the Word that was made flesh into the history of mankind in unity of race, our people is the consecrated people of God.

Through the Incarnation the whole of humanity was radically taken up to salvation in this member of our family, Jesus Christ. The moment the Logos assumed a human nature from the one mankind and in union with it, our redemption was assured. Because Christ is one of us, the world is reconciled, in principle, with God; because of Him the grace of God appears in place and time. Christ is the sign of God's redeeming grace,

which in Him comes to manifestation and is definitely given to the world. He is the great primeval sacrament of God; and St. Augustine goes so far as to say: "There is no other sacrament of God than Christ."

A sacrament is a sign that signifies and conveys God's gift of love to men. That is why Christ is the sacrament *par excellence*, the supreme sign of God who is love and source of all grace. The Savior is the visible appearance of God's redemptive love and our one access to salvation. For the contemporaries of Jesus, encounter with Him was an invitation to encounter with God, because this Man is personally the Son of God. We who come later cannot encounter Him in the same fashion; in His visible form He has departed from our midst. But the sacraments of the Church bring us into living contact with the eternally living Christ. Consequently the sacraments of the Church stand on a Christological foundation. They sacramentalize Christ's redemptive work and apply it to us. "What was visible in our Redeemer," in the words of Leo the Great "has passed over to the sacraments." To clarify the Christological basis of the sacraments, we have to examine their ecclesiological dimension.

### Exalted Sacrament

The man Jesus Christ is the sign of redemption—a sign that contains and conveys the reality which is signified. But up to the Parousia this heavenly sign remains invisible to us men on earth. That is why the Redeemer has given it a visible prolongation, the visible Church. As Christ is the sacrament of God, the Church is the sacrament of Christ. As the actions of the earthly Christ were the actions of God performed in a human way, so the actions of the Church are the actions of the now invisible Christ permanently carried on in visible form. Thus the Church is the perfect living sacrament of Christ whose redemptive Incarnation it announces and communicates.

What we ordinarily call the seven sacraments must be situated in this larger sacramental society that is the Church. For a sacrament is primarily and basically a personal act of Christ Himself, performed through the earthly visibility of the Church. As Christ still acts invisibly in His glorified body in heaven, so He acts visibly in and through His earthly body, the Church; the sacraments are personal saving acts of Christ

which take the shape of visible acts of the Church.

In the encyclical *Mystici corporis*, Pius XII sums up all Catholic tradition when he says that it is Christ who baptizes, who absolves, who sacrifices. Christ is really and personally present in the Eucharist; yet He is present also in the other sacraments, by reason of His act of redemption that is ever operative. Christ Himself is present in both cases, although the foundation of His presence is different. In the Eucharist He is present by the power of transubstantiation; in the other sacraments He is present under a visible sacramental form by the power of His continuing act of salvation. Since the human body of Christ is now glorified, the sign of the life-giving act of salvation accomplished by Him has become invisible for us; nevertheless His body is mysteriously prolonged in a visible, earthly shape, that is, the sacramental Church, which is His body. When we say that a sacrament, sign of grace, confers the grace it signifies *ex opere operato*, we ultimately mean that in that sacrament we have an act of Christ performed in the Church. What Christ on earth did alone in objective redemption, on our behalf and in place of all of us, that He now does in the sacraments for those who receive them and, in the Eucharistic sacrifice, for all men, that all may be brought into union with the people of God, the holy Church He has acquired.

As the projection of Christ in the world, the Church is the great sacrament, origin of the sacraments in the usual sense of the word, and has its sacramental structure from Christ. This truth involves the consequence that whenever salvation is offered and imparted to any man, that man enters into some relationship with the Church. Such relationship may vary enormously in grade and intensity, but cannot be totally lacking. There can be no instance of salvation where the person saved can say that he never had anything to do with the Church. Whoever finds salvation, finds it in the Church. The person concerned may never have even heard of the Church; yet the redemptive grace of which he is the beneficiary implies a true relationship with the Church and its sacraments. This does not mean that every reception of salvation from the Church is invariably a reception of a sacrament in the technical sense. But where the Church in its official, social capacity and activity confers saving grace, there we have sacraments in the

proper sense. Without the Church, no sacramental act is possible.

To understand this truth, we must have a correct notion of the Church. In the present context the Church is the community of the faithful, the new people of God, the society of all who are called and received into God's Kingdom. Indeed, it is the very Kingdom of God, socially and hierarchically organized, of this final phase of earthly history, the Kingdom in which Christ exercises His kingship, in which He distributes the goods of the new salvation.

This new community of God is a body, the mystical body of Christ Himself. One and the same Holy Spirit who fills the God-man unites the citizens of the Kingdom of God with Christ and also with one another. They all have the Spirit of Christ in common, so that we rightly speak of the Holy Spirit as the one soul animating the one body of Christ. Jesus Christ is the head of this body and as such uninterruptedly sends His Spirit into it to guide and sanctify it. At the same time He selects various members as definite organs of the body and appoints them to the functions and services that correspond to the offices they have received. Thus the Church is a social, supernatural community of salvation and a hierarchically structured body, in which the many organs and members exercise differing powers.

### The Church A Sacrament

This Church, Christ's mystical body, is visible. Everywhere it manifests its mission and its task, the bringing of salvation to all mankind. It sanctifies and saves its members, and through them reaches out to those who are still to be saved. Accordingly it is a sacramental organism of salvation, for in its visible form it signifies grace and confers grace.

Since Christ, head of this sacramental organism of salvation, is incessantly active in it and at every instant sends His Spirit into the whole body and its individual members, we fittingly regard the Church as the ever-living and ever-acting Christ. The Church does nothing that Christ does not accomplish along with it; all its sacramental actions are His actions. He sends His Holy Spirit into the acting organs of His body in order that, filled and moved by Him, they may perform the actions that signify and impart grace.

Thus the power and efficacy of the sacraments are grounded on the fact that they

are saving acts of Christ continuing to act in the Church through His Spirit. That is why these acts are never empty; they are always full of the grace they signify.

But only the qualified member of Christ's mystical body is empowered to perform the saving sacramental act. Baptism seems to be an exception; but it is only an apparent exception. The Church co-operates even in the baptism administered by an unbaptized person. To act validly the minister of the sacrament must in some way, deliberately or obscurely, explicitly or implicitly, relate himself to the Church, if only by having the intention of doing what the Church does. Thus there is no sacrament apart from the Church. If a person does not have grace from the Church, he does not have it at all.

The life of grace is conferred when Christ sends His Holy Spirit. Hence it is always Christ who in the Spirit accomplishes the sacramental activity of the Church. As the Church is never active without its organs and members, so it is never active without Christ. Through the Church and its qualified members Christ Himself carries on His redemptive activity for the consecration of the world and the salvation of mankind. The sacraments are unthinkable without Him and without the Church.

Sacramental activity imparts grace because it is a saving activity of the Church that is united to Christ and is filled with His Spirit; indeed, it is the activity of Christ Himself. This activity unfailingly reaches its goal, unless a man refuses its power. Christ's action is never without issue. The same is true of the sacramental activity of the Church. Because Christ Himself performs this sacramental activity through His Church, the sacraments achieve their effects *ex opere operato*.

The sacraments, accordingly, are by no means incidental or occasional in the Church. They are activities essential to its life. The Church is not static; it is vitally dynamic. If we wish to enhance our knowledge of what the Church really is, we must see it as energetically operative in the vital functions that are the sacraments.

In undertaking a brief survey of the seven sacraments in relation to the life of the Church, we shall do well to begin with the Eucharist. For the Eucharist, as sacrifice, is the converging point of the Church, the sacrifice in which Christ constantly renews the covenant of God with His people; and Holy Communion is the fraternal repast at which

Christians of every race and nation are nourished on the same Bread of Life to perfect their unity as one body of Christ. The other sacraments all have their finality in the Eucharist; they prepare for it or are in some way referred to it. After the Eucharist come baptism and confirmation, the two stages of Christian initiation that orient the recipient toward the Eucharist. Next come the two medicinal sacraments by which Christ through the Church provides remedies for the sins of Christians and for illness, the penalty of sin; these are penance and extreme unction. Last come the two functional sacraments which define a special way of serving the Church; the sacrament of Holy Orders perpetuates the priestly ministry of the Church, and matrimony consecrates husband and wife in the responsibility they take on of procreating and educating children for the Church.

### The Great Sacrament

The reason why the Eucharist is numbered third in the traditional list of the sacraments is its position in the ancient ceremonial of Christian initiation. The catechumen admitted into the Church had to receive baptism and confirmation before he was allowed to take part in the Eucharistic sacrifice. But from the point of view of the Eucharist itself and its supreme importance in the life of the Church, it occupies the very first and highest place, because in it Christ in person gives Himself to the Church as the foundation of the Covenant as center and source of Catholic unity, as Bread of eternal life. The Eucharist is the great sacrament, and we indicate our grasp of this truth when we call it the "Blessed Sacrament." Because of what it is and what it does, it is out of series; we may not put it on a par with the rest of the sacraments. This is clear from the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and from the fact that it is not only a sacrament but a sacrifice.

The relation of the Eucharist to the Church is quite obvious. Our faith informs us that the Mass is so truly the sacrifice of the Church that even the so-called "private Mass of an isolated priest is always the sacrifice of the entire Church; and Communion is a deeper insertion into Christ's mystical body. Reception of Christ's mystical body in Communion assures us the grace of Christ because this common eating of one Bread is

the effective sign of a more penetrating and more vital membership in the body of Christ that is the Church.

A most important consideration is the fact that the words of consecration are the words of the new and eternal covenant that was concluded in the blood of Christ. These words of covenant are the words by which Christ is made present in the Eucharist. Therefore He is present precisely as the foundation of the covenant between God and men, hence as the source and bond of the unity of the Church. Because He gives Himself ever anew to the Church in the very act in which he, the high priest, offers Himself to the Father as victim of the redemptive sacrifice, and because He is present in the Church in sacramental accessibility, the Church itself exists. And when the Church gives the body of Christ to a Christian in Holy Communion, it makes that person an ever more perfect partaker of the unity and love of the holy covenant of God with His people, and so fills him with all grace.

Not much has to be said about baptism; its relationship with the Church is evident. Every instructed Catholic knows that baptism is the sacrament of incorporation of men into the Church as members of the mystical body. Membership in the Church is the effect primarily signified by this sacrament of Christian initiation, and brings with it all the other baptismal effects. In the New Testament, as formerly in the Old Testament, the beneficiary of salvation is always, in the first instance, the people, the Church as partner in the covenant with God; individual men receive grace as members of this people of promise. So powerful is this effect of baptism that even when a baptized person, as Pius XII teaches in the encyclical *Mystici corporis*, is no longer an actual member of the Church, because he is a schismatic or a heretic or an apostate, nevertheless the baptism he has received orients him to the Church in a way that is not verified in a non-baptized person, even though the latter, by reason of union with God in perfect charity, may be living in sanctifying grace.

Relationship of the sacrament of confirmation with the Church is not hard to detect. Confirmation gives the Holy Spirit in view of the vast mission of Christ that is carried on by the Church—the mission of worship, intercession, sacrifice of reparation, and the apostolate. This sacrament presupposes baptism, in which the Holy Spirit communicates

Himself as principle of supernatural life, of radical union with the incarnate Son of God. Confirmation is the sacrament that incorporates us into the mystery of Pentecost, the laying on of hands for imparting of the Holy Spirit for the mission that is to transform the world by empowering the members of the Church to be witnesses of God in the world, testifying that God does not abandon the universe to the nothingness of its sin, but redeems, saves, and transfigures it.

When we describe confirmation as the sacrament of strength in the faith and of witness to the faith, we may not understand this only in the sense that by confirmation the Christian receives the grace, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to preserve his faith in a world that is hostile to the faith. By confirmation the Christian is raised to spiritual adulthood and is sent out on an apostolate befitting his position in the Church. This is not merely an apostolate of defense of the Church, to maintain and save it in anxiety, but is an apostolate assigned to the Church to save the world. The grace of confirmation is indeed a grace given to the individual concerned with saving his own soul; but it is also, and particularly, a charismatic gift, that is, a gift which is rich in blessings for others, to co-operate in the mission of the Church for the salvation of all men. Thus confirmation is the sacrament of the apostolate of Pentecost, the apostolate of witness, as activity of the Holy Spirit through the visible activity of adult sons of God in the Church.

### Aspects of Sin

Sin has two distinct but inseparable aspects. When a person commits a grave sin he turns away from God by a deordinate attachment to creatures. Such is sin essentially—for anyone, whether Christian or pagan. But for the Christian sin also has an ecclesiastical dimension. The Church has the task of manifesting the victory of grace and the inception of the Kingdom of God. Sin cannot be a matter of indifference to the Church of Christ. The Church must react against sin, by which a member of the salvation community sets himself in opposition not only to God but also to the Church, seeing that the Church is the basic sacramental sign of God's grace. That is why the Church removes the sinner from itself by some form of ejection, which is not indeed excommunication in any sense, but in our day, for example,

consists in exclusion from the Eucharistic table. The consequence is that the sinner cannot be regarded by God as pertaining to the holy community in the full sense of enjoying all its rights and privileges, and that he cannot, as long as he clings to his sin, share in the salvation which God bestows on men in the Church of Jesus Christ.

Thus the sinner places himself in a false situation respecting both God and the Church; his sin excludes him from the salvation of the Covenant and makes him unworthy to take full part in the sacrifice of the Covenant by reception of the Eucharist. Therefore he must in repentance return to favor with the Church and with God by submitting to the judgment and requirements of the ministers of the Church. If the Church imparts sacramental absolution and so releases the sinner by restoring him to full peace with the Church, then God too regards him as really again a member of the salvation community in good standing, and so forgives his sins. Reconciliation through the Church is also reconciliation with the Church and so with God, for reconciliation with the Church is the efficacious sign, the sacrament of reconciliation with God in Christ.

A Christian is seriously ill, and death is more than a remote possibility. He knows that he has often offended God during his life, and that his fidelity in serving his Creator has been marred by many lapses. The hour approaches for rendering an account of his stewardship. Can he really expect the reward of eternal beatitude, or will temporal death lead to the dread second death? In his crisis he calls on the Church to come to his rescue. And the Church responds. The priest comes, official representative of the Church, hears the sick man's confession and imparts sacramental absolution. The priest anoints him with the holy oils, sign of exorcism and consecration. The action of the Church with its prayer and sacramental anointing restores peace and hope; Christ, far from abandoning His member who has fallen ill, comes to save him from assault. The sick man can calmly and trustfully await the issue of his illness.

Thus the Church, in its official capacity, stands at the sick bed and takes its part in the drama of death, which on the human level is so stark a solitude. A Church that could not or would not do this would not be the Church of eschatological hope. The relationship between the Church and the sacrament of last anointing is clear, both in the

sick man himself who, as a baptized member of the Church, receives this anointing, and in the action of the Church, which comes to the aid of its member in urgent need and shows itself in solidarity with him. The Church is the earthly representative of Christ's redemption that has triumphed, not only over sin, but also over death. Extreme unction is the act of the Church that conquers death to the benefit of a Christian who is gravely ill; it is a sacrament that, in some cases, heals illnesses, or, if in God's providence death should climax the illness, gives the future life that follows death.

The two sacraments referred to as "functional"—for want of a better name—sanctify the recipient with immense spiritual riches, but they do so by equipping him for special functions in the Church. They confer on him charge over souls and confide to him responsibility over a part of Christ's flock. A man is not a priest mainly for himself but for the Church. A man is not a husband and a woman is not a wife primarily for themselves but for the home, for each other, and for the children to whom they give life and whose human and religious development they must direct. A man is a bishop or a priest to assure the spiritual vitality and religious government of the Catholic community. A Christian is married to procure the human continuity of the Church, to consecrate to God the transmission of human life among the Christian people of the earth.

## Holy Orders

The relationship of holy orders to the Church is readily perceptible. Apostolic office, the ecclesiastical episcopacy, is required by the very existence of the Christian community. The people of God is built up on sacrament and word. Christ has entrusted the hierarchic leadership of this people of God to the apostolic function, which possesses authority to govern, the charism to proclaim God's word, and power to sanctify in the Church. The ordinary priesthood is an auxiliary sacerdotal corps assisting the apostolic or episcopal body.

The highest power conferred by sacerdotal ordination is exercised in the celebration of Mass. This central act of the Church is a divine gift bestowed on the whole Church, a sacrifice offered to God by the whole Christ through the priest. At the altar the priest represents God and Christ in the presence of

the entire Church, as he also represents Christ and the entire Church in the presence of God. Day after day the Mass makes the redemptive sacrifice sacramentally available to the people of God and communicates the sacrifice of the High Priest to His mystical body.

In its visible form the Church manifests itself not only as mystical body of Christ, but also as spouse of Christ. Matrimony is an image, an echo of the love between Christ and the Church, as St. Paul attests in Ephesians 5:32. Christian marriage and God's covenant with mankind in Christ are not merely capable of being compared to each other by us, but in themselves display so striking a likeness that matrimony objectively represents the love of God in Christ for the Church.

If we ask why and in what sense the marriage contract between Christians is a sacrament, a sign efficacious of grace, we can clarify the question by situating the Christian home in the life and mission of the Church: what is its function in the mystical body of Christ? It is the basic cell of the Church, the minimum human society in which Christian life normally develops. True Catholic families are the foundation of the human and religious vitality of the Church.

When a Christian man and women marry, they give to each other the right and the mission to procreate and educate new Christians. Such missions and power come from Him who is the head of the Church, source of its life, its divine Spouse. By espousing the Church at the price of His blood, Christ has made the human marriage contract a Christian marriage sacrament. Thus Christian conjugal love is raised to the rank of a sacred sign. By giving themselves to each other, the Catholic husband and wife express Christ's love to each other by their own conjugal love.

Each day death takes from the Church some of its members, who accordingly must be replaced. The sacrament of matrimony fills up the void. But its function does not stop there. In the home the Christian family forms on a tiny scale what the Church is on

a grand scale; the family is the basis of every society, religious no less than civil. By assuring the continuation and circulation of grace to ever new generations, married couples perform an indispensable service for the building up and the vitalizing of the Church.

Theologians who have been writing on the subject of the relationship between the Church and the sacraments these latter years seem to be in accord that the first effect of each of the sacraments (*the res-et-sacramentum*) is a new and specifically different form of union with the Church. The sacraments join us to Christ in grace because they place us in contact with the Church; they insert the recipient, in a way that varies in manner, depth, and finality with each sacrament, into the mystical body of Christ.

### The World's Redemption

When we study the sacraments we also study the Church in its most precious possession and its most powerful activity. To cast doubt on the role of a single sacrament compromises the economy of salvation established by God when He sent His Son into our midst. The Savior has confided all the sacraments to His Church, to equip the Church for its mission of saving mankind by means that are visible and thus befit both the Church and men. We must seek an understanding of the sacraments from a Christological and ecclesiological point of view; we must come to a perception that the sacraments are the concrete expression of the apostolic life of the Church, the visible continuation of the God-man's saving activity among men. In the sacraments Christ's unceasing act of redemption is directed to all men through His Church, which manifests and conveys His redemptive will to the world.

Blessed are we if by the mercy of God we have found the true Church on earth, the promise and the beginning of the Church of eternity, which has received its everlasting life from the sacraments of Christ in the Kingdom of His love.



# The Art of Giving Instructions

Rev. James J. Killgallon

The term commonly used to describe the preparation which a convert undergoes before being received into the Church is *instruction*. The convert is said to be "taking instructions." Actually, this crucial period in the life of the convert includes more than the mere imparting of information which would come under the heading of instructions. But it is still quite accurate to say that during this period the priest is giving instructions and the convert receiving them. It is the content of these instructions and the manner in which it is presented which principally concern us here.

## Catechetics An Art

The teaching of Christian doctrine is acknowledged to be an art. Here, then, as in every art the *modus agendi* will be determined by the end in view. In this case the end is to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in forming a mature, responsible, and active member of the mystical body of Christ. If the end were merely to turn out someone who "knows the teachings of the Church," then a cold exposition of the articles of the creed, the sacraments, and the commandments would suffice. But the aim of our instructions is vastly more than this. We are not endeavoring to wind up with the kind of superficial Catholic whom we meet all too often—the kind who is orthodox in his belief in the sense that he accepts intellectually the doctrines which the Church teaches, but whose attitudes and manner of living are indistinguishable from those of people who have no faith at all. Nor are we content to produce the legalistic kind of Catholic, the kind who views the Church and the sacraments as a sort of gigantic supernatural vending machine. Nor do we want the immature type of Catholic, who expects the

Church to do all his thinking for him and whose prayer life is centered on private devotions rather than on the Eucharist. Of course, much will depend on the capabilities of the convert. Some will be very limited intellectually. Some will be unimaginative and lacking in enthusiasm. Nonetheless, a certain definite type of orientation must be given to all, within the limits of their capabilities, if the convert is to be the kind of Catholic which the Church needs here and now.

Perhaps, the most important element in this orientation is the idea of community. At the very outset the convert should be made aware of the fact that he is preparing to be incorporated into a body—the living body of Christ. Even though the convert may have been a truly religious person before seeking admission to the Church, the chances are that his religious life up to now has been quite individualistic. He must be made to realize that becoming a Catholic means more than entering into a deeper personal union with God. He must be made to realize that becoming deeply involved in the family of God that it means a commitment to Christ as He is today—the mystical Christ, Christ living, suffering, and acting in the world, Christ struggling to re-fashion and transform the world.

## Living Organism

To this end the Church should be presented not merely as an institution founded by Christ and watched over by the Holy Spirit, but as the body of Christ, whose soul, the Holy Spirit, lives and acts within it and in its members. The convert's life should be explained as the living out of his vocation as a member of Christ's body. He should see the sacraments—not only baptism, confirmation,

and marriage, but also Eucharist and penance—in their proper setting, with all their essential social implications. He should see his growth in sanctity not as a merely individual thing, but as his growth as a member of Christ's body. The convert should be shown, right from the start, that being a Catholic means being apostolic. He should be impressed with the fact that as a Catholic "he is the Church," that he must take part in the Church's work of penetrating the world and of increasing in numbers. The convert must be taught that the first, greatest, and most essential thing the Church does is worship God. He must see the Eucharist as the very center of the Church. He must be made to realize that as a member of Christ's body his highest and greatest function is to participate in the Mass with his fellow-members in Christ. While the convert must be taught the importance of private prayer and helped to form habits of prayer, his prayer life should be firmly rooted in the Mass and the sacraments, in the worship which the Church in its entirety offers to God through Christ, her head, and which the members offer to Christ.

### Legalism or Grace

One of the problems with which all priests have to contend is legalism among our people. Mortal sin is too often thought of as simply the breaking of a law, a legal infraction which entails a legal penalty, but which can be rectified by confession and absolution. This is the attitude of the mother who tells her children on Friday, "We have nothing in the house to eat except meat. Go ahead and eat it and go to confession tomorrow." This is the attitude, too, of the person who commits one fully deliberate mortal sin and who goes blithely about his business, not really troubled in conscience, for months, until Christmas or Easter or some other event occurs which he associates with confession. To prevent this sort of attitude in a convert it is necessary to give a full presentation of the divine life of sanctifying grace. The convert must be thoroughly impressed with the reality of grace and of its supreme importance. He must be shown that the Christian life is a life of loving union with God. He must see that mortal sin is nothing less than a rejection of God, of His life, and of His love.

The convert must be protected from an-

other false attitude, too—that which regards Christian morality as a joyless observance of a body of arbitrary laws. He must be shown that the Christian life is a life of love. He must see the commandments not as merely laws which restrict his freedom, but as the minimum requirements of love of God and of one's neighbor. He must, by all means, see that the Christian life entails much more than merely "keeping the commandments," "keeping out of sin," but that it is a positive and ever-deepening practice of love.

### Catechesis and Scripture

What is called for, then, is a living, joyful, positive presentation of the faith rather than an academic exposition of formulas. And the source from which this presentation will come is Scripture. The truths of the faith can appear cold and lifeless if they are presented in theological terms. They come marvelously to life when they are presented as the Gospels give them to us, from the lips of our Lord. It is one thing to enumerate the seven corporal works of mercy; it is quite another to read Christ's words, "I was hungry and you gave me to eat . . . As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me." It is one thing to discuss the processions in the Trinity; it is another to read the words of Jesus about the Father and the Holy Spirit. It is one thing to see the Church as the family of God in the world today; it is another to see how the people of God developed from a man, from a group of tribes from a people, from a kingdom, into the great and wonderful fulfillment — the living union of all God's people with Him and with one another in Jesus Christ. If the convert is to be imbued with the spirit of Catholicism it is essential that he be grounded and centered in the Scriptures. Such a scriptural presentation will require something from the instructor. It will require that he himself "search the Scriptures" in preparing his instructions. It will require that he break out of the mold of creed, sacraments, and commandments—presented in an academic way—and present the truths which are contained in the creed, the reality

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of the sacraments, and the full meaning of Christian living in a fresh and living way. It will mean taking Scripture as the very vehicle by which the truths of the faith are presented, instead of using it merely in the form of a short quotation which clinches the point. For example, in this method of presentation one might teach the truth of the universality of the Church by taking the parables of our Lord which bring out this truth — the Mustard Seed, the Marriage Feast. Then one would present the words of Christ to the apostles, "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature . . ." Finally, one would show from the Acts of the Apostles how the apostles began to preach to the gentiles (Cornelius, Paul's missionary journeys). A set of instructions for convert classes which uses this approach and is based on the Gospel of St. Mark is being used experimentally in several Chicago parishes at the present time.

It is of paramount importance that what is presented in the instructions given to the convert be integrated into his prayer life. Since the prayer life of the convert is to be, first of all, a participation in the prayer life of the Church, it is essential that he see the doctrines he is learning as they appear in the liturgy. He must begin to join with the faith-

ful in the worship of the Church right at the outset. He must be made to see that the highest and most important expression of what he believes is worship, both the worship of the Church and his private prayer.

Finally, there must be a tie-up between what the convert is learning in his instructions and his daily life. There must be a reduction to practice of the truths he accepts. There must be a response from the will to what the intellect receives. In this important matter the instructor will have to act as a prudent guide, suggesting, checking, encouraging, sensing when he should require more, when he should not press too hard.

In most cases the priest who instructs a convert is a very strong influence in the life of the convert. The priest is contributing vitally to the formation of a member of Christ's body. That formation, to a great degree, is in his hands. The instructor who realizes this fact will never be content merely with "covering the matter" or "getting through the catechism." Rather, he will be aware that when he is "giving instructions" he is doing what Pius XI described as the work of all who teach Christian doctrine—helping to form Christ in one whom Christ has redeemed by His blood.

■ ■ ■

### The Council and Christian Unity

Once the council was under way, the Holy Father raised the Secretariat for Christian Unity, headed by Cardinal Augustin Bea, to equal rank with the other commissions of the council. This suggests the satisfaction of the Holy Father—and of most of the bishops, no doubt—with the extraordinary accomplishments of the secretariat. It also strengthens the position of this body, enabling it to present proposals to the Fathers of the council and to enter into joint commissions with the other commissions. It symbolizes, finally, the Holy Father's constant effort since 1959 to keep Christian unity in the forefront, as the meaning and goal of all efforts at inner renewal. If, in the workings of God's Providence, the liturgical renewal is pushed forward vigorously by the apostolic college of bishops in union with the successor of Peter, a great first step will have been taken "that all may be one."

FREDERICK R. McMANUS



# CATECHETICAL MATERIALS

The extensive and prolonged use of any catechetical aid does not prove its excellence. It may simply be that there is a lack of choice either by reason of available materials or insufficient publicity for those on the market. On the other hand, it may very well be due to satisfaction with the aid. While we are constantly looking for better things we might suppose the possibility that some of long-standing are not simply suitable, but even superior.

In the field of audio-visual aids, a perennial with many instructors is a series of slides on the Mass photographed and edited by Father James McVann, C.S.P., professor of Canon Law at St. Paul's College, Washington, D.C. For many years Father McVann has spent much of his spare time in educating the laity to the meaning of the Mass. To this end he experimented with movies and slides until he finally came up with what this reviewer considers to be the best set of slides he has seen in seven years of convert instruction.

Other users are of the same opinion. What, however, is even more important is the reaction of those being instructed. An instructor's opinion might be biased by his own background. What he finds excellent might be considerably less so for those he is teaching.

Consequently these slides were made the subject of a minor research project by the Paulist Institute at the Information Center it controls for such purposes. The test demonstrated that the groups exposed to them found them most helpful. And on the basis of a limited comparison they chose these slides by more than two to one.

There is no lettering, no distracting print. There are simply good pictures of the various actions of the Mass. The instructor can consequently order his commentary to his

group. He can also suppress certain slides, if he wishes, so that he might highlight the general structure of the Sacrifice. This provides an obvious advantage over strip film.

Indeed, instructors faced with one hour for a class would be bound to omit some of Father McVann's slides. For there are not some seventy or eighty of them, but an even hundred. The reason for this large number is the inclusion of shots of the altar, the altar stone, the bread, wine, vessels and vestments. Thirteen slides are devoted to these things. There are also some pictures of Benediction and High Mass. For an expanded showing these extras are most valuable.

The various vestments are shown in detail so that there is every opportunity to explain their history, meaning and symbolism. Attention is given also to the different colors. This permits the instructor to explain the significance of the colors and to speak upon the liturgical structure of the Church Year. What he says is reinforced by the sight of the various colors.

Some of the shots are particularly good. That of the Minor elevation, taken at close range, is a perfect piece of photography. There is also a most unusual picture of the inside of the chalice just after the *Fractio Panis*. It affords a great opportunity for telling the meaning of the mingling of the consecrated Elements.

Altogether, these slides are a teaching device on the highest level for convert instruction. They also lend themselves to many other purposes, for they can be used for both children and adults.

The slides sell for \$30.00 a set, prepaid. They may be ordered from Father James McVann, C.S.P., St. Paul's College, Brookland, Washington 17, D.C.

JAMES B. LLOYD, C.S.P.

# READING I'VE LIKED

Monsignor Francis J. Lally, editor of the *Boston Pilot*, once again reveals himself as a discerning observer of the Church on the American scene. In *The Catholic Church in a Changing America* (Little, Brown & Co., \$3.75) he writes with a professional journalist's touch on some of the issues which help to mould the public "image" of the Church. Race relations, taxation and religious schools, Catholic and Jewish relations are some of the questions on which he offers constructive criticism and suggestions. This slim volume is a worthy contribution to improved inter-group association on which so much of the pastoral work of the Church depends.

In the work of popularizing the insights of recent biblical studies, Father John J. Castelot of the Sulpician Fathers has won an honored place. *God So Loved the World* (Fides, \$3.95) is his latest volume and should be on the list of all inquiry classes and information centers. Along with rich scholarship and experience in teaching Sacred Scripture, he always manifests clarity and a lively style. He devotes ten chapters each to the Old and New Testament themes which are indispensable to an understanding of the Good News we should be ceaselessly announcing to inquirers.

It is unfortunately true that one of God's greatest gifts to His Church, the Sacrament of Penance, should be one of the greatest stumbling blocks on the toilsome journey of many inquirers to the Church. Thanks to recent developments in sacramental theology, especially with regard to Penance, priests are in a better position to present the Church's doctrine with immensely greater effectiveness. *Sin and Penance*, by Rev. Peter Riga (Bruce, \$4.25) is a signal contribution to the literature on the Sacrament of God's mercy and will enrich our instructions on this greatly misunderstood subject.

Pastors, and priests who conduct parish missions, will be interested in a small volume *The New Parish Mission*. It is a translation of the larger work in French by Jean-François Motte, O.F.M., rendered into English by Paul J. Oigny, O.F.M. (Franciscan-Herald Press, \$1.75). On the continent of Europe, parish missions have undergone a thorough-going overhauling. They now reflect the best results of the current Catholic revival in scholarship and pastoral concern. And the French bishops are on record as saying that the life of the faith in France will in large measure depend on the success of this new

approach. This small book may serve as an introduction to the whole subject and we trust it is only the forerunner of many books on the content and conduct of a parish mission in America.

A question frequently asked by librarians at information centers is for a single volume on the saints which combines historical accuracy, relative brevity and respect for the heroes of the Kingdom of God. Our choice for that rather tall order is *The Saints: A Concise Biographical Dictionary*. Edited by John Coulson (Hawthorn Books, Inc., \$12.95). A team of distinguished writers—like Fathers Martindale, Bede Griffiths and Francis Courtney with laymen such as Christopher Hollis, E. I. Watkin and Evelyn Waugh—combine to make this a remarkable achievement. They succeed admirably in the aim of the editor: "Let the Saints appear as they are and the edification will look after itself."

## GUIDE

- A publication of the Paulist Institute for Religious Research.
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# *Guide Lights*

## **COMMENT ON THE COUNCIL . . .**

The first session of the Vatican Council has ended. Those who have been termed "Traditionalists" are reported to have found its temper too progressive for their more measured mind. It is not that they represent a united and unyielding bloc committed to the status quo. A few may be complete reactionaries, but it would be fairer to suppose that all the so-called traditionalists look for change in varying degrees. They are suspicious, however, of seemingly sudden changes. A sudden change might be defined as one consequent upon currents of thought that depart from past patterns too abruptly to have secured that favorable evaluation which only time can rightly supply.

Sudden, however, is a relative term. Its use is conditioned by circumstances of place and person. Some proposals that provoke protest may have an honorable longevity obscured by lack of popular circulation, historical interruptions, or unfortunate associations. Others, indeed, may seem rather novel, and yet they may be no more than the natural offspring of well-established principles wedded to pressing problems of the present. On the other hand, certain ideas may well be shallow conclusions conceived as ready answers to particular concerns and pet projects.

It is good that God has not made us without individual differences of temperament and disposition. It is good that He has not subjected us to identical environments. As it is, we live in a constant occasion of intellectual impatience with others, without which desirable progress is hard to imagine. It is in opposition that we form and reform our thought, pare and polish it, unless we are mentally underprivileged or conditioned to conformity. At the same time, it is in humility that we are able to discover reasonableness in others and to make those concessions and compromises which provide positive contributions to the common good.

It would be unfortunate if we should be so uncatholic as to commit ourselves to a camp unfailingly identified by rigidity. We should have convictions. An open mind is not synonymous with an empty mind. And it will follow that we will be classed with others who have similar convictions. Apart, however, from matters which are not negotiable, to borrow a political expression, we should

be ready to listen as well as to speak. And it is a mark of humility that we listen to understand, and not simply to marshall our next onslaught of criticism. If we desire to change others, we should be prepared to change ourselves, in degree, if not in substance. To coin an epigram: Only God is infallible, and apart from God, only a fool is immutable.

It would seem that something of this spirit has been experienced in the first session of the Vatican Council. There appears to have been a whole spectrum of opinion on the matters set forth. These opinions have been the subject of frank discussion which has generated more light than heat. Traditionalists may not be pleased by the prevailing directions that one discerns in a shadowy way through the silken veil of secrecy, but their part in the deliberations might prevent hasty action without impeding true progress. The minority role is an onerous one, but is as important in free discussion as an anchor is to a ship. It helps to prevent indiscriminate drifting.

## **FREE AND FRANK . . .**

The frankness and freedom of expression by all the participants at the council has been remarked on by several of the non-Catholic observers. The Disciples of Christ, who are generally considered to be unfriendly to the Church, have an observer-delegate who stressed this point in an interview with Religious News Service. He said it "impressed and really surprised" the observers. Dr. Jesse M. Bader, of New York, general secretary of the World Convention of Churches of Christ (Disciples), said that cardinals, bishops and abbots have been most outspoken. "They are not of the same mind, nor do they hold the same opinions." In manner of a compliment, he said that they "speak frankly in their public addresses in much the same way as is done in a Protestant assembly or convention." If it accomplishes nothing else, the council is certainly upsetting the image of the Church as a monolithic structure.

## **THE LAITY . . .**

Among the things discussed at the first session was the place of the laity. The council's official communique stated that at the 32nd meeting there was a plea that "greater prominence" be given to the principles from

which lay people derive their dignity. It said that this is sometimes referred to as "their priesthood—inasmuch as they are members of the Mystical Body of Christ, from which they have the duty of establishing the reign of Christ in the modern world through their own authority and competence and not only as executors of the directives of the hierarchy."

At the 33rd meeting a bishop, whose identity was not revealed, said that lay experts should be called on to contribute to the work of the council in fields in which they are specialists. The council communique said that he suggested that "laymen could make a valuable contribution to the studies of the council in questions related to their specific competence, such as the communications media, and in regarding special aspects of their activity in the world." The same bishop also requested a solemn proclamation on the importance and the function of the apostolate of the laity in the Church today.

#### THE UNIVERSE ON UNITY . . .

The Universe is England's national Catholic newspaper. It has been running a series of articles on unity by leading non-Catholic spokesmen. Archbishop Heenan in summing up the articles said:

"There can be no doubt that some Catholics regard the whole question of Christian unity with the utmost reserve. They fear that other and more simple Catholics may be misled by all this talk of coming closer together. Lacking a deep and sound knowledge of the Faith they may be tempted to imagine that differences of religious conviction no longer matter.

"This coming together of Christians of every kind is in the first place an exercise of charity. It is also the result of improved education.

"The stage which we have now reached on the road to Christian unity is much more like a halfway house than the end of a journey. We have reached a stage where we can discuss our differences in charity and peace. The importance of this phase is that we are able both to spread the knowledge of Catholic truth and to correct the false notions we ourselves may have about the beliefs of non-Catholics.

"If we have the spirit of true apostles we are bound to seek to spread the truth. But we shall never disseminate the word of God unless we are interested in those who are living without our religion and perhaps without religion of any kind. We can best know and help people if we take the trouble to find out what they believe and why they believe it.

"Catholics, to speak frankly, have been so accustomed to having to fight that they need time to adjust themselves to conditions of

peace. But to be nostalgic for the battlefield is to ignore the message which Pope John has given to the world ever since he became Pope."

#### TALK TO TEACHERS . . .

The message of the Pope is one of peace and conciliation. This spirit is in all his public utterances. Speaking to a group of Catholic teachers in public schools, he said that it was not their duty to make converts but to impart the lessons of Christianity by their own Christian lives. "You must not mean to proselytize," he said, "which would have the reverse of the effect intended, nor must you attempt to force the religious sentiments of children. Your duty is to live according to the clarity and imperatives of the principles of the Gospel."

#### NEWS FROM NEW JERSEY . . .

Changing a fifteen year policy against Sunday use of school buildings, the Board of Education in Pequannock, New Jersey, agreed to let Our Lady of Good Counsel Mission use the town's public high school for Sunday Masses. Among those who urged the change was the Rev. Donner B. Atwood, pastor of the First Reformed Church. He said he sympathized with the Catholic priest involved because of his own experience in establishing a new congregation in Long Island, New York.

#### SEPARATED BROTHERS . . .

"The council will consider pastoral suggestions," says Father Thomas Stransky, "on how we can better determine and respect what makes non-Catholic Christians our brothers and how we can heal the tragic wounds that make them separated. On a practical level, how we can begin to form a united Christian effort to work out the solutions for instilling Christian principles in family, civic, political life, on an international as well as a national level? The council most likely will press for greater cooperation among all Christians in realistic actions against nuclear warfare, the plight of the hungry and the homeless, and the effects of rapidly expanding population in some areas of the world.

"Of extreme importance to a growing pluralistic and one-world society are the two topics: church-state relations and religious liberty. Ecumenists are convinced that Catholic relations with other Christian communities cannot be securely founded until a Catholic doctrine of tolerance is fully developed. Strong council voices will plead that the Second Vatican should do more than sanction a 'policy change,' based on mere social or political expediency."

JOHN J. KEATING, C.S.P.

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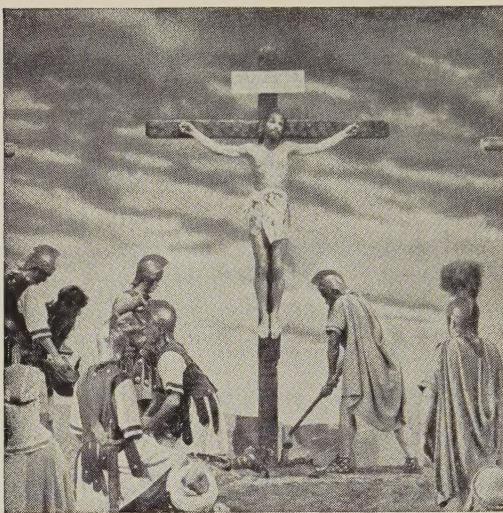
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We think that priests who are interested in convert work will be pleased with this material. Those who have already received it have been, and some of them have promptly ordered additional kits for their friends.

The cost per kit is \$1.00.



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## Adult Instruction Materials

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NEW YORK 19, N.Y.